Albania

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Agriculture position in the overall economy

With a contribution ranging between 50 and 55 percent of GDP over the past years, agriculture in Albania has been, and continues to be, the engine of economic growth since the transition in 1991. Agriculture provides a direct livelihood for about 45-50 percent of the population and the domestic production meets up to 70% of the total food requirements (of the population). A persistent negative agricultural trade balance represents a major component of the overall trade deficit. Agricultural exports are 8 times lower than imports. Agricultural exports represent 16 percent of total exports, while agricultural imports 30 percent of total imports.

Sector Policy

Agriculture was the first sector of the centralised economy to be privatised beginning in mid-1991. Given the profound changes that took place in agriculture and the situation the country went through during 1997, the Government set, as one of the objectives of its programme, formulations of a strategy for the agricultural development. The document produced in 1998 "The Green Strategy" to be used in a medium-long perspective focused on a number of strategic priorities.

Agriculture should be considered as a priority branch. What is considered essential is the acceleration of production growth in most performing

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sectors and elimination of handicaps relative to certain other production sectors.

Regarding crop production, vegetables and fruits are considered as priorities to meet the needs of the country, eliminating imports and stabilising exports. Concerning the fruit tree industry, the cultivation of fruit trees, grapevine and citrus will be promoted, in accordance with international standards.

It is forecasted that the national fruit industry will meet nearly 80-85% of local needs in 2006. Moreover, the approval of a favourable fiscal policy for encouraging the production of plant propagating material is a necessity.

Fruit tree industry: production, trade flows and germplasm

Fruit trees. The fruit species in Albania count nearly 5.1 million of trees of which 4 millions of bearing trees. The fruit tree industry is increasing rapidly considering that in 1992 trees were only 3.5 millions. During 1998, 52,541 tons of fruits were produced, a quantity still insufficient for the local consumption. About 37,800 tons of fresh fruits were imported during 1998, a number, however, lower than that of 80,000 tons of fresh fruits imported in 1996. The native varieties are but important particularly for plum, peach, fig etc.

Grapevine. The national production of 1998 was 68,327 tons versus only 37,800 tons of 1992. This production mainly comes from the vineyards but also from pergolas which are traditional in many Southern grapevine-growing areas. Local germplasm is very rich and economically important for the national production.

Olive. The olive trees in the country are nearly 3.5 millions and the production in 1998 was 46,876 tons. The olive industry is based on the local varieties which represent more than 90% of the total

production. However, the olive oil importation for 1998 was 437 tons.

Citrus. The production of citrus during 1998 was 2,216 tons, the minimum of the last decade. The production decreased by about 80% with respect to that of 1992, with the subsequent necessity of important quantities of citrus imports.

Sanitary status of the crops with particular reference to quarantine agents

Fruit trees. Studies carried out in Albania have showed a compromised sanitary status of stone fruit trees due to the presence of many virus diseases. The presence of PPV is the major threat for the stone fruit industry with a complicated picture composed of PPV-free areas as well as low-rate and high-rate infected regions. The eradication of PPV is still possible in the Western coastal plain considering the small size and limited number of orchards present. In this context PPV-free areas should ensure the production of certified plants and the establishment of new orchards in the near future.

"Fire blight" is reported in different areas of pome tree cultivation. The main foci are found in the West coast where pear is more cultivated. The traditional areas of apple cultivation in North Eastern and South Eastern Albania needs to be monitored in the future. So far no data have been available for virus diseases of pome fruits in the country.

Citrus. CTV was reported for the first time in the country in 1998. The virus was found first in a varietal collection of the Pomology Institute of Vlore in orange, mandarin, lemon and citron. Other surveys reported new foci, but a few infected plants, in other areas of the country.

Grapevine. All major virus diseases of *Vitis* were shown to occur in Albania, including especially fan leaf degeneration (distorting and chromogenic virus strains) and its nematode vector *Xiphinema index*, leafroll, rugose wood and fleck. The high occur-

rence of rugose wood and leaf roll in native cultivars can be taken as an indication that these diseases (and their putative agents) have been with Albania vines for long time.

Olive. A recent study carried out with dsRNA technique limited to the native varieties, reported a surprising low level of infection compared with the other Mediterranean Countries. More tests are necessary to have a comprehensive picture of the sanitary status of the crop.

Nursery sector

The nursery activity, organised before 1990 on public farms, satisfied the national need. At present, this public activity has been drastically reduced and the increasing demand of the domestic market for grafted plants is met by the importation of grafted plants and, to a lesser extent, by some small private nurseries.

Plant Protection: service and Institutions

The plant protection service is organised in the framework of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MAF). The Department of Plant Protection Service (DPPS) of MAF has its peripheric officers in every district.

The Plant Protection Institute of Durres (PPI-D) is the scientific institution under the umbrella of MAF. The PPI-D has an experience of 30 years and its facilities offer diagnostic service mainly for phytopathology (mycology) and entomology.

The Department of Horticulture, Agricultural University of Tirana (DH-AUT) is a training and research centre involved in the plant protection field for more than 30 years. Fields of research interest are entomology and mycology, but during the political crisis of 1997 its facilities and laboratories were severely damaged.

Pomology and Certification Institutions

The Pomology Institute of Vlore (PI-V) is a scientific institute of MAF involved in the research and extension related with fruit trees, olives, grapevine and citrus cultivation.

DH-AUT is an important training and research centre for the cultivation of fruit tree crops.

The State Entity of Seeds and Seedlings (SESS) is a public agency under whose responsibility, the production of propagating material is carried out.

Certification

Legislation. In 1993, the Albanian Parliament issued the law Nr. 7659 "On seeds and grafted plants", and the law Nr. 7662 "On plant protection service". The first law provides for the establishment of the legal bases for the activities concerning plant material and the second one organises the plant protection service.

The plant protection legislation (Law and its related Orders and Decisions) are under revision and improvement in collaboration with the Dutch Plant Protection Service in the framework of a cooperation project.

Certification of propagating material. Only in 1996, by developing the above laws, the MAF Regulation Nr. 163 was issued followed by several technical protocols dealing with the production, conservation and use of certified propagating material in Albania. In the same regulation the measures are given for the eradication of quarantine agents (Sharka, Tristeza, fire blight) which could compromise a successful certification programme. At present the certification service is not run yet because the country lacks the necessary facilities (greenhouse, screen house) and laboratories (diagnosis and *in vitro*).

Quarantine. Plant quarantine service in general and quarantine legislation in particular are improved, in compliance with EPPO guidelines and di-

rectives. Quarantine A and B lists are reviewed and proposals were made to adjust the lists, whereas a list was made with Q-organisms to be monitored every year.

Facilities needed for certification

Personnel training

More than 30 researchers, from MAF, IPP, DH-AUT and PI, are trained in long-term stages abroad, mainly in Italy, in topics related to certification (virology, nematology, bacteriology, propagation of plant material, etc). Other technicians and private nurserymen have attended short-term stages and technical visits to the certification service running in Apulia region.

International co-operation

In the framework of the co-operation between Italy and Albania, MAF (PPI-D and PI-V) and Italian Institutions (Mediterranean Agronomic Institute and University of Bari), a long-term project was started: "Production, conservation and use of certified propagating material for the development of qualified nursery activity in Albania". This project includes stone fruits, grapevine, citrus and olive crops. An important aspect of the programme is the safeguard of Albanian germplasm for fruit trees, already well-established in different ecological areas of the country.

The infrastructures and fields needed to run a certification programme (laboratory equipment for phytopathological diagnosis, air-forced glasshouse for biological indexing, screenhouse for the conservation of healthy plant material, *in vitro* laboratory for premultiplication activity, variety demonstration fields, mother fields, etc.) should be supplied by the project.

Recently, another collaboration project was established between the MAF and the Dutch Government on "Strengthening the plant protection services in Al-

bania" (Anonymous, 1997) dealing more specifically with quarantine topics. This new scientific support joins very well the objectives of the certification programme.

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